DONNA FARHI

Teaches Yoga Foundations

MasterClass

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The Last Word

Seminal texts to expand your yoga practice beyond the mat

MEET DONNA FARHI

Donna's restorative approach to yoga is for everybody (and every body)

Perhaps the most striking thing about yoga is the diversity of its practitioners. It includes people of all genders and ethnicities, fitness levels and spiritual beliefs, ages and abilities. Their reasons for pursuing yoga are equally as diverse. Some are hoping to increase their flexibility and balance. Some are seeking respite from physical pain, or solace during difficult periods. Others simply want a way to feel more connected to themselves and to those around them.

Donna Farhi understands all of these motivations. At different moments during her four decades studying and teaching yoga, the practice has alternatively inspired, challenged, and comforted her. It all began after her family moved from Southern California, where Donna was born, to New Zealand, when she was 10.

"I found myself in a foreign coun-

try with no...friends, completely alone. It was a devastating time for our family," she says. "My mother did not cope well with the move. I came home from school one day to discover that my mother had tried to take her life. And that moment changed the trajectory of my entire life."

The turmoil had a serious impact on Donna's health and well-being, too. By the time she was 13, her hair had started falling out in clumps. She didn't feel safe at home or at school—until she happened to take an elective yoga class.

"I remember that class as this pivotal moment of feeling suddenly calm," she says. "I hadn't felt calm or safe or okay in myself in a long time. It was such a revelation, because I could conjure up this feeling of calm through doing something as simple as a movement...and linking it with my breath."

Yoga offered an escape, a solitary activity that could be done in her bedroom, and she began practicing habitually at the age of 16. The physical benefits also complemented her primary area of study—contemporary dance—which brought her joy during her teenage years. But by her early 20s, that joy was fading, and Donna says she struggled to find the same connection in other pursuits. She was also suffering from back pain. She let go of dancing at 23 and decided to seek out the best yoga teacher she could find: Judith Lasater, the legendary Bay Area instructor and founder of *Yoga Journal* magazine. At the time, Lasater wasn't

“It was a
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movement
and breath.”

taking new students and had a two-year waiting list for her classes.

"I just kept knocking on the door," Donna recalls. "I said, 'I am going to study with you. I have to study with you.' She let me into her classes. And within about a year, I made the decision that I would study to become a teacher."

Donna went to train in San Francisco, and she was certified as an instructor in the Iyengar yoga method. But the guru-student dynamic didn't sit quite right with her. She was also doing therapeutic bodywork, and she noticed how clients would often come to her with the idea that she could "fix them"—and how those same clients would come back with the same problems every week. Clearly, something wasn't working. In the early 1980s, she decided to break from the Iyengar community and create her own method of practicing and teaching yoga.

"I spent many years stabbing in the dark trying to find my way with that," she says. "But it required that I go very deeply into my practice and find something authentic. Something that felt in integrity with my values."

Eventually, Donna says, she realized that she didn't want to be cast in the role of a healer. Instead, she wanted to empower others, giving them the skills needed to practice self-care. She eschewed the traditional pedagogy model, which relies on the teacher to instruct the student through hierarchy, and developed a unique approach. In it, she would guide rather than enforce. This remains the bedrock of her practice and philosophy.

"I'm not interested in telling people what to do or in making people change. So I create a context where they can enter into a deep inquiry that they are mediating. I pose questions. I don't give answers," she says. "That process of inquiring is really one of investigation and discovery. And then it becomes your discovery. It becomes something that you can own and you can use. If you want to enter into a shared inquiry with me, where I learn from you, you learn from me, that is the exchange that takes place. It's a mutual dialogue."

It's also an unqualified success. Today, Donna is one of the most celebrated figures in the yoga world. She resides on a 30-acre farm in Christchurch, New Zealand, but continues to travel the globe leading intensives and instructor-training programs. She has authored three modern classics (*The Breathing Book*; *Yoga Mind, Body & Spirit: A Return to Wholeness*; *Bringing Yoga to Life: The Everyday Practice of Enlightened Living*) as well as a seminal curricular text for teacher ethics (*Teaching Yoga: Exploring the Teacher-Student Relationship*). She draws from this deep well of yoga experience and translates it to easy-to-understand cues for students and teachers alike.

In her eyes, the foundational aspects of yoga are the most important for a healthy mind, body, and practice. Accordingly, Donna's class aims to distill these elements—yoga knowledge accumulated over a lifetime of learning—down to their most essential principles. This includes setting up for basic standing-pose work; traditional movements, including those from sun salutation; making inroads to meditation; and committing yourself to the practice of relaxation.

If you're new to yoga, Donna hopes her approach will be "a refreshing surprise," wiping away preconceptions. In doing so, she extends an invitation to begin your yoga journey, which might have seemed unsuitable, or even impossible, for you before. And if you've been practicing for some time? Well, this class might provide a reorientation. Not only around how you can practice, but *why*, evoking inspiration anew and offering an even greater motivation to continue on your yoga path.

"I think the thing that continues to take me back onto my mat every day is the pure simplicity of the practice," Donna says. "There's this kind of crystal-like aspect...there's always some kind of positive change that occurs. And it sets me up for the day."

To her, the heart of yoga is learning how to be compassionate and kind to yourself. In doing so, Donna believes, you can find a greater capacity to be compassionate and kind to others. There's an undeniable beauty in this idea, one that underpins the essential practice: By embarking on a deeply personal journey, we can have a positive impact on others and make the world a kinder, better place.

YOGA 101

A handy guide to the basics

What is yoga?
Yoga is a practice that links body and breath through movement and meditation. The practice has been around for nearly 5,000 years in some form; *The Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali, likely compiled around 400 to 500 BCE, created a systematized outline of the practice.

Got it. So what does the word *yoga* mean?
The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root word *yuj*, which means to "yoke," "join," or "unite." Here, it's about binding together the breath, body, and mind. In the modern world, this might encompass a variety of practices, done in a variety of environments. Some of the most popular types of yoga in the U.S. include *Vinyasa*, or flow yoga; *Ashtanga* yoga; *Kundalini* yoga; restorative yoga; and meditation yoga.

Sounds intense. Does yoga always have to be physical?
No, yoga is not just a physical practice. And it's only as intense as you want it to be. Yoga encompasses layers of philosophy, meditation, and guidelines for living well. It's about taking your aspirations—to feel calm, vibrant, healthy, connected—and making them into "a present- tense possibility," as Donna says. This goes beyond the asana, or poses, which focus on stability and strength. Even those are less about movement and more about learning how not to move—which is to say, learning how to be steady and comfortable in your surroundings.

Okay. But don't I need to be flexible to do yoga?
Here, Donna doesn't mince words: "There is not a single sutra that has the word *flexibility*." The truth is that anyone can do yoga; all types of bodies can experience a pose. And that experience is more important than whether you can touch your toes. That said, yoga can help you become more flexible in a physical sense. It can also offer tools for dealing with difficult and stressful times.

What about those fancy mats and trendy yoga pants? Do I need special equipment or clothes?
Nope. You can use things that you have around your home. (See "Get Into Gear" on page 11.) As for clothing, wear something comfortable!

Fitting Yoga Into Your Life

Stillness has a place—any time, any space

I'M TOO TIRED
The Bhagavad Gita, one of yoga's foundational texts, explains how no step on the path of yoga is wasted. That includes the non-physical aspects. You can simply sit at your desk or on the couch and follow the rhythm of your breath. (Yes, that counts as yoga.) You could also try a guided meditation if you're seriously wiped and can't do physical asanas.

I DON'T HAVE SPACE
If you're doing physical asana practice, you'll need enough room to lie on the floor with your arms overhead. This usually amounts to an area measuring roughly six-by-three feet, and it's fine if that space is temporary. Studio apartment? Slide the coffee table against the wall. House in the 'burbs? Pull your car into the driveway and use the garage. Get creative, and ignore the noise of Instagram inspo. There's nothing wrong with unrolling a mat on the kitchen floor.

MY PERSONAL LIFE IS... *HECTIC*
You don't need a "perfect" vibe to practice yoga. A place to call your own is helpful, but if you have pets or family members running around, embrace it. Their interruptions can all be part of your practice; work on staying connected and mindful. Also, consider doing Yoga Nidra, which emphasizes meditation. With practice, you can do this anywhere, anytime. Some teachers suggest that you lie in bed to practice!

GLOSSARY

The beliefs, practices, and ideas you may encounter in yoga

ASANA
The Sanskrit word for "pose." This is a general term used to describe both sequences and a single pose in yoga.

ASHTANGA YOGA
Ashtanga means "eight limbs," and this type of yoga is generally much more structured than other varieties. *Ashtanga* largely sticks to a set sequence of poses (known as Primary and Secondary series) that a practitioner moves through at their own pace. When a student cannot do a pose, they stop there and return the next day, then restart the same sequence. This continues until they gain enough strength and flexibility to move on to the next pose (*Ashtanga* is typically practiced early in the morning, up to six days a week).

CHAKRAS
Seven wheels of energy that are believed to be centered along the spine, from the base of the pelvis to the crown of the head. The chakras are often associated with the colors of the rainbow, moving from red (at the base of your pelvis) to purple (at the crown of your head).

HATHA YOGA
A modern type of yoga that involves long-held poses. Typically this yoga is slightly slower-paced than modern *Vinyasa* yoga, and sequences can vary.

KOSHAS
The sheaths of the body. In yoga, there are five: *Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya*, and *Anandamaya*. The first and outermost, *Annamaya*, is referred to as the gross body. *Pranamaya* is the life force or energy force of the body, linked to the breath. *Manomaya*, the mind layer, deals with thoughts and emotions; *Vijnanamaya* is focused on intuition, wisdom, and perception. *Anandamaya*, the innermost sheath, is known as the bliss sheath. It represents unending joy, love, and peace.

KUNDALINI YOGA
Kundalini yoga is a form of yoga that involves chanting, meditation, movement, singing, and breathing exercises, believed to awaken *Kundalini* energy that's said to reside at the base of the spine. *Kundalini* energy moves up the spine through the seven chakras.

MANTRA
A word or saying that is repeated during meditation or a yoga practice. One mantra Donna uses is the Gayatri Mantra:

Sanskrit
Om bhur bhuvah svah
Tat savitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yo nah pracodayat
Donna's translation
Everything on the earth, in between and above
Is arising from one ever-renewable source
If my thoughts, words, and deeds reflected this complete understanding of unity
I would be the peace that I am seeking in this moment.

NAMASKAR
A traditional Indian greeting or gesture of respect. Typically done at the end of a yoga class or when saying "namaste."

NAMASTE
A *namaskar*, usually given while pressing the palms against each other in front of the heart center and bowing the head. ("Namaste" translates as "I bow to you.") You'll hear this said as a closing to many classes, too.

OM OR AUM
The sound made when chanting in yoga class. Often given as a mantra, om has a wide variety of significant meanings in yoga: It embodies the idea of the unification of mind, body, and spirit, and it can also represent the sound of the universe, or all sounds together.

PRANA
Energy or life force. Often associated with the breath.

PROPRIOCEPTION
Awareness of our body in space.

RESTORATIVE YOGA
A type of yoga that focuses on deep relaxation through long-held poses that are often supported by various props.

SANSKRIT
A language of Southeast Asia that is frequently used in yoga for mantras, pose names, meditation techniques, and other yogic work. Some communities in India still speak Sanskrit.

SURYA NAMASKAR
Sun salutation, or a sequence of poses done to warm the body. There are three main variants of the *Surya Namaskar*, which all progress along different patterns.

VINYASA
Sometimes used to refer to a series of postures done in the common sun salutation sequence.

VINYASA YOGA
A modern type of yoga where one pose flows into another, almost like a dance sequence. Typically in *Vinyasa* yoga, practitioners do one breath and one pose.

YIN YOGA
A practice of yoga that is similar to restorative yoga, in that it uses long-held poses for deep stretching and relaxation but incorporates some practices of Chinese medicine.

YOGA
The practice of specific poses, meditation practices, and philosophy that helps yoke breath, body, and mind. One misconception is that you need to be flexible to practice yoga—you do not.

YOGA NIDRA
Yogic Sleep, a practice that uses deep guided meditation to relax and rejuvenate the body. This practice invokes a state between being awake and being asleep, wherein the practitioner is still conscious of what is happening around them.

Sun Salutation

SURYA NAMASKAR

There are three main variants of the Surya Namaskar, *which all progress along different patterns. Here, you'll find the 10-part sequence for* **Surya Namaskar A**.

RAISED HANDS POSE
Urdhva Hastasana

MOUNTAIN POSE
Tadasana

RAISED HANDS POSE
Urdhva Hastasana

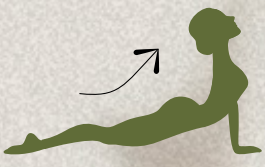
FORWARD FOLD
Uttanasana

FORWARD FOLD
Uttanasana

HALF FORWARD FOLD
Ardha Uttanasana

HALF FORWARD FOLD
Ardha Uttanasana

DOWNWARD FACING DOG
Adho Mukha Svanasana



UPWARD DOG
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

LOW PLANK
Chaturanga

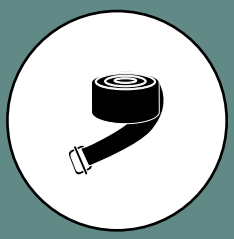
GET INTO GEAR

Common yoga props
(and clever DIY alternatives)

Like other modalities that involve physical movement, yoga uses props to make more facets accessible to more people. They support the body: If you can't touch your toes, a block or chair helps bring the floor closer to you. Props are a fantastic way to get the sensation of a pose, too. Here's a rundown of basic yoga gear, which will help as you progress through Donna's class—and beyond. Not ready (or able) to make the investment? No worries. We've included suggestions for budget-friendly alternatives, too.

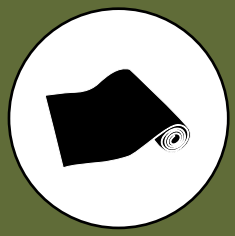
YOGA BLOCKS

Made from foam, cork, or wood, blocks help raise the floor to meet you in more challenging poses. Stacked books can also work, and if your practice uses blocks to squeeze or lift, you can sub in a rolled towel or blanket.



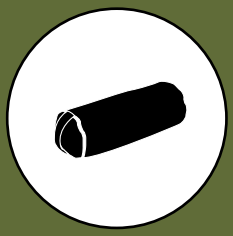
YOGA STRAPS

When you have a limited range of flexibility, yoga straps can help you get into a pose as well as support your mobility. If you don't have a strap, you can swap in a necktie, belt, or even a plain towel instead.



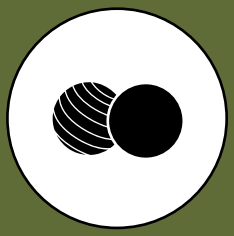
YOGA MAT

While modern yoga students typically use a rubber or plastic mat, early practitioners often relied on blankets. You can do the same, but be sure to lay it on something grippy so it doesn't slide around during sessions.



YOGA BOLSTERS

Generally seen in restorative and meditation-style classes, yoga bolsters support the body in reclined or seated poses. If you don't have a bolster, you can use a couch cushion or a firm pillow as a prop instead.



MYOFASCIAL RELEASE BALLS

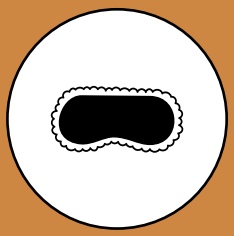
Used to massage different muscle tissues, the balls come in numerous types and sizes, depending on the body part you are targeting. Any tennis ball, lacrosse ball, or racquetball will also work.

YOGA BLANKETS

Often serape-style, blankets offer firmness and weight while being washable and easy to store. A bath towel or a small throw will do just fine, as long as it provides some padding and firmness when rolled or folded.

YOGA CHAIR

In classes geared toward those who cannot (or do not want) to get on the ground, yoga chairs are often used; they resemble folding chairs without a back. You can substitute a standard folding chair or a small ottoman.



EYE PILLOWS

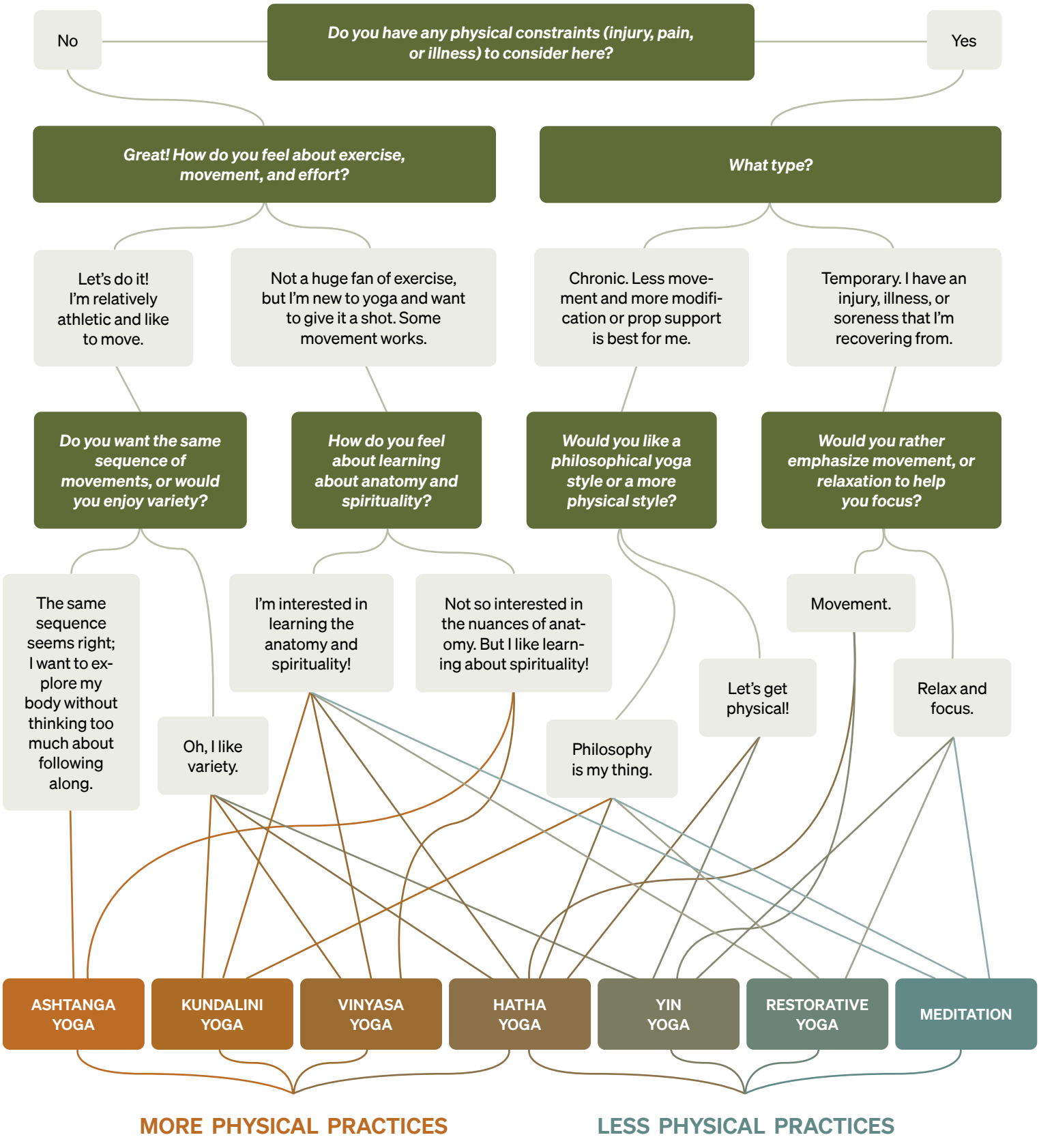
Draped over the face to enhance relaxation poses and meditation, these pouches are filled with grains and aromatherapy oils. Make your own with a new sock or old pillowcase, uncooked rice, and a few drops of essential oil.

PRIVATE PRACTICE

THE WORLD OF YOGA IS EXPANSIVE. *Sometimes the practice emphasizes physical activity; other times, you simply sit or lie down and meditate. You might break a sweat, get a light cardiovascular workout, support your resting heart rate, or learn to relax—or a unique combination thereof. Really, the important part is finding the right variety of yoga for you. It'll deepen your connection to the practice and ensure that you get the most benefit from it. Not sure where to start? Follow this guide to narrow down your options. If you've been practicing for some time, take a moment to reevaluate; reflect on your abilities, injuries, movement needs, and personal preferences, which can all shift over time. You might even need to try a few different practices. That's okay. Be patient. Giving yourself permission to grow and evolve is part of the journey.*

Find Your Yoga Practice

Which yoga should you follow? It's a deeply personal choice. And with thousands of types to choose from, it can feel a little overwhelming


Do you have any physical constraints (injury, pain, or illness) to consider here?
No
Yes
Great! How do you feel about exercise, movement, and effort?
What type?
Let's do it! I'm relatively athletic and like to move.
Not a huge fan of exercise, but I'm new to yoga and want to give it a shot. Some movement works.
Chronic. Less movement and more modification or prop support is best for me.
Temporary. I have an injury, illness, or soreness that I'm recovering from.
Do you want the same sequence of movements, or would you enjoy variety?
How do you feel about learning about anatomy and spirituality?
Would you like a philosophical yoga style or a more physical style?
Would you rather emphasize movement, or relaxation to help you focus?
The same sequence seems right; I want to explore my body without thinking too much about following along.
Oh, I like variety.
I'm interested in learning the anatomy and spirituality!
Not so interested in the nuances of anatomy. But I like learning about spirituality!
Philosophy is my thing.
Let's get physical!
Movement.
Relax and focus.
ASHTANGA YOGA
KUNDALINI YOGA
VINYASA YOGA
HATHA YOGA
YIN YOGA
RESTORATIVE YOGA
MEDITATION
MORE PHYSICAL PRACTICES
LESS PHYSICAL PRACTICES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

YOGA IN THE WEST

The modern ubiquity of yogic exercise has strong (and long-standing) intellectual roots

Over the past half-century, the growth of yoga in the Western world has been nothing short of breathtaking. It's everywhere—social media, fitness clubs, boardrooms, and designer fashion. This is especially true in the U.S., where yoga is now among the most popular of exercise modalities, an industry unto itself. But the Western fascination with yoga goes back centuries and has little to do with the physical asana movements now commonly associated with the practice.

The origins of the practice are truly ancient. Yoga comes from traditions that date back to around 2000 BCE when the Indus Valley Civilization thrived. From there, a number of different forms of yoga evolved, primarily taught and practiced by men to commune with the universal spirit. It was a way to cultivate knowledge and, in some cases, escape the suffering of the cycle of existence. Each school took a different approach to achieve enlightenment. *Karma* yoga became known as the yoga of action; *Bhakti* yoga, the yoga of devotion; *Jnana* yoga, the yoga of knowledge.

These practices were largely passed down as an oral tradition, from teacher to student, for centuries. Sometime between the second and fifth century BCE, Patanjali, a sage and student of yoga, began to write down 195 aphorisms, or sutras (words of wisdom), about the path of yoga. Referred to collectively as *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, these texts don't describe particular asanas, or poses. But they do provide the backbone of the modern yoga practice we see today.

c.2000 BCE

Yoga originates, according to some historians, from beliefs held by people of the Indus Valley Civilization.

c.350 BCE

Patanjali, a sage and student of yoga, writes down 195 aphorisms, or sutras (words of wisdom), about the path of yoga.

Another core text is the *Bhagavad Gita*, a part of the epic *Mahabharata*, an ancient Indian philosophical text likely from the 2nd century BCE. The story takes place in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior, and Krishna, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Krishna gives Arjuna advice about life and his future while fighting family members on the battlefield. The *Gita* is considered to be a guide to all the different paths of yoga.

Foreign-language translations of these texts facilitated the spread of yogic ideas outside of India. The *Gita* was first rendered into English in 1785, published with an reverent preface by Warren Hastings. Its impact on the U.S. was immediate. (Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were both influenced by Indian philosophy and exchanged letters about the subject.) The German Romantics—Hegel, Herder, Schlegel—were enamored, too. Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote that "this episode of the *Mahabharata* is the most beautiful,

nay, perhaps even the only true philosophical poem which we can find in all the literatures known to us."

During the mid-19th century, the Transcendentalists also found inspiration in the *Gita*, honing in on the spiritual and introspective elements of yoga. Ralph Waldo Emerson's journals include frequent mentions of medieval Indian scripts; his poem "Brahma," published in *The Atlantic* in 1857, is an ode to Hindu concepts of time and space. As Natalia Petrzela notes in *The Washington Post*, Henry David Thoreau was drawn to yogic life as a form "of resistance to mainstream market capitalism."

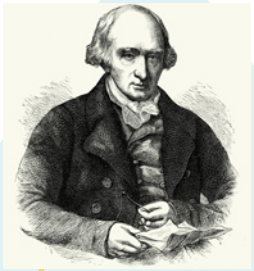
They weren't alone. Madame Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society of America, speculated on the yogic subtext of Jesus in Western theology. Evelyn Underhill, one of the most prolific English-language pacifist authors, wrote about achieving "a contemplative life" and endorsed "the deliberate and regular practice of meditation." Into the 20th century, yoga remained largely the purview of the Indian elite. But intellectual practitioners were beginning to sew a grassroots movement stateside.

Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu monk from Calcutta, proved one of the practice's most important Western ambassadors. In 1893, he delivered a now-famed lecture about intolerance and religion at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. He also founded the Vedanta Society, the first teaching institution for Indian philosophy in the U.S., the following year in New York City. While Vivekananda's time in America was truncated by illness, another monk, Paramahansa Yogananda, made Los Angeles home, settling there in the 1920s. He established the Self-Realization Fellowship in Mount Washington, California.

Yogananda had a tremendous impact on the popular image of yoga as we know it today. In the early 20th century, the Western understanding of the practice was primarily focused on movements as a process for attaining physical health. (Its most influential figure, Eugen Sandow, was a Prussian bodybuilder; early illustrated, English-language handbooks told of the "yogic physical culture.") But Yogananda focused on the big tent, explaining how the *Sutras* and the *Gita* could lay out a path. You didn't need to live an ascetic life or renounce worldly possessions, he explained, to commune with the universal and escape life's constant churn.

The appeal of his approach was multifaceted. Chiefly, it relied on the scientific method, in that each practitioner could apply the tenets to their own lives and reliably return the same results. His "science of religion," as he called it, made this appealing to Westerners who were going through their own renaissance as science and technology thrived in the postwar era. To wit, his memoir, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, circulated widely during the 1960s and '70s, and was later promoted by thought leaders like Steve Jobs. The book has purportedly sold more than 4 million copies worldwide; according to the publisher, roughly 175,000 copies were printed in 2016 alone—more than half of them in English.

The same year, *Yoga Journal*, a leading industry magazine in the U.S., and Yoga Alliance, the nation's largest instructor sanctioning body, released a landmark study. According to their data, more than 36.7 million Americans practiced yoga; modeling by Statista indicates that figure has since eclipsed 55 million. To be sure, the boom reflects a number of developments, particularly the heightened focus on wellness and the popularity of postmodern thought. But in many ways, the yoga boom in the West is the culmination of centuries of philosophical groundwork—and a testament to the awesome adaptability of an epic Indian tradition.



1785

The Bhagavad Gita, *considered to be a guide to the different yoga paths, is translated into English.*

1893

Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda lectures on intolerance and religion in Chicago; he establishes the Vedanta Society in New York a year later.

1920s

Another monk, Paramahansa Yogananda, settles in Los Angeles and establishes the Self-Realization Fellowship in Mount Washington, California.

BASIC POSES

WHETHER YOU'RE JUST STARTING A YOGA PRACTICE *or building on a wealth of previous experience, it's important to maintain a grasp of basic poses. In this guide, we'll briefly cover common foundational asana from sun salutation. Know that several of them involve props (see page 11) and that their exact names and positions might vary, depending on the type of yoga practice you're engaging. Also pay attention to the reference levels—"Beginner," "Intermediate," and "Advanced"—which note how you can adapt these poses based on your experience, comfort, and level of mobility. Be mindful of your health and fitness, and listen to your body.*

01

Easy Seated Pose

SUKHASANA

This can be any permutation of a seated pose, done while sitting flat on the floor with a cushion, rolled-up blanket, towel, or block, or while sitting in a chair. It's often used to set students up for meditation.

BEGINNER

If you can lower yourself to the floor, start by sitting so your hips are slightly raised off the ground. Extend your legs out long in front of you, and flex through the soles of your feet. Cross your right ankle over your left and bend both knees, bringing your ankles under your knees into a cross-legged seat. Find a place where your spine is long but keeps its natural curve. Adjust your support as needed.

INTERMEDIATE

For a deeper version of *Sukhasana*, start by lowering the height of your cushion, block, or blanket, letting your pelvis rest on the floor. Tip the front of your pelvis forward so that you can support the natural curvature of your lower back. At the same time, reach up through the crown of your head as if someone is tugging a string that attaches there. Close your eyes and breathe.

ADVANCED

Some advanced practitioners like to sit in lotus or half lotus (*Padmasana* or *Ardha Padmasana*) for meditation. This requires quite a bit of flexibility in the ankles, hips, and knees, and is not recommended for those with any issues in those areas. Come to sit on the floor with both legs out straight in front of you. Bend your right knee and draw your right foot to the root of your left thigh, so your heel is close to your belly button. Then bend your left knee and draw your left foot to the root of your right thigh, so your heel is close to your belly button.

02

Mountain Pose

TADASANA

This is a standing pose where your arms can be at your sides or lifted over your head, incorporating a slight backbend with your gaze lifted toward your thumbs. A foundational pose, it helps us gain awareness of our body in space.

BEGINNER

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, toes pointed forward. Your knees should stack over your ankles, your pelvis neutral, stacked above your heels. Your shoulders should stack over your hips, and your head should be in a neutral position. Rest your hands by your sides, and turn the palms forward. Close your eyes. Breathe from the soles of your feet into your body.

INTERMEDIATE

Standing with your feet closer together, imagine drawing from your inner ankle bone up to your inner groin. Feel your legs firm. Engage your belly, and draw it up and in toward the base of your rib cage. Draw your shoulder blades back and down alongside your spine; stack your head over your heart, drawing your ears back slightly and tucking your chin so the back of your neck elongates. Keep your hands at your side or move into *Tadasana* with your arms up over your head, a pose sometimes called upward salute, or *Urdhva Hastasana*.

ADVANCED

Standing with the inner edges of your feet touching, draw your outer shins back in space without moving your feet. Draw from your inner knee up to your inner groin, then imagine zipping up a tight pair of jeans from your pubic bone to your belly button. Engage your core, and draw your belly button toward your spine. Without flaring your ribs, draw your shoulder blades toward each other and let them slide down your back. Draw your head over your heart and slightly tuck your chin so that the back of your neck lengthens. Raise your straightened arms up and overhead with the palms facing each other for *Urdhva Hastasana*.

03

Forward Fold & Half Forward Fold

UTTANASANA & ARDHA UTTANASANA

For Uttanasana*, place your hands near the floor or feet, and fold your body in half at the hips, with legs straight or slightly bent. For* Ardha Uttanasana*, let your hands rest on your thighs, knees, or shins. Gaze ahead at the floor.*

BEGINNER

From *Tadasana*, inhale and lift your heart, then exhale, folding at your hips. Try not to round through your back or pelvis. (Place your hands on blocks or a bolster to bring the floor up to you.) If you have tight hamstrings, try bending your knees slightly, and keep working to get those legs straighter. For *Ardha Uttanasana*, on your next inhale, lift your torso until it comes roughly parallel with the earth and rest your hands on your thighs, just above your knees or on your shins, depending on your flexibility. On your next exhale, fold back to *Uttanasana* with blocks or a bolster under your hands.

INTERMEDIATE

From *Tadasana*, inhale and lift your heart, then lift your hands over your head, palms facing each other. Exhale and fold at your hips, keeping your spine neutral. Place your fingertips or palms on the floor in front of or next to your feet. Let your head hang heavy. Draw your belly button toward your spine and gaze toward your shins or knees. Keep your legs as straight as possible without hyper-extending your knees. For *Ardha Uttanasana*, inhale and bring your torso parallel to the earth. Rest your fingertips on your shins, and gaze toward the ground beyond your feet. Engage your core; don't allow your weight to rest on your arms. Exhale, and return to *Uttanasana*.

ADVANCED

From *Tadasana*, touch the inner edges of your feet, inhale, and lift your heart. Lift your hands over your head, palms facing each other. Exhale and fold at your hips; keep your spine neutral. As you reach the end of your range of motion, place your palms on the floor beside your feet, your fingertips in line with your toe tips. Hang your head heavy. Draw your belly button toward your spine and gaze toward your shins or knees. Keep your legs straight without hyper-extending your knees. Let your nose reach your shins or knees. Do not rock your weight; keep it grounded into the middle of your feet. Inhale, come up onto your finger pads, and gaze forward. Exhale, and return to *Uttanasana*.

04

Downward Facing Dog

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

Adho is derived from the Sanskrit word adhas*, which means "down," and* Svana *means "dog." The pose's shape resembles a dog stretching: Your hands and feet are on the ground while your hips and pelvis are lifted up.*

BEGINNER

Come down onto all fours on the floor. Place your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Tuck your toes, and press evenly onto your hands, lifting your hips toward the sky. Keep your knees slightly bent so your heels lift off the mat. (Be sure to distribute your weight evenly across your hands and feet.) Let your head hang between your arms and take a few deep breaths, continuing to work your heels closer to the ground. If you'd like to feel the sensation of grounding the heels, use a rolled-up towel or folded blanket beneath your heels. You can also use blocks under your hands to get your heels to the mat and work to straighten your legs.

INTERMEDIATE

From forward fold, plant your hands on the mat and step back so your feet are hip-width distance, your body forming an upside-down V shape. Press your palms into the mat, straighten your elbows, and internally rotate your upper arms while shining your inner elbows toward the top of your mat. Straighten your legs to move your heels more toward the mat. Actively press down into the Ls of your hands and the soles of your feet. Take 5 to 10 breaths here.

ADVANCED

Following similar cues for the intermediate level, come into your *Adho Mukha Svanasana*. Focus on drawing your sternum toward your shins and moving the crown of your head more toward the floor, all while keeping your elbows straight and pressing evenly into your palms. Firm your upper thighs and focus isolating your upper inner thighs, rotating them back and apart while keeping your feet firmly planted on the mat. Actively move your chest more toward the floor. The soles of your feet should completely connect to the floor.

05

Low Lunge & High Lunge

ANJANEYASANA & UTTHITA ASHWA SANCHALANASANA

These poses are great for opening your hip flexors and the fronts of the thighs, and engaging your hamstrings. These pose names can often be used interchangeably (or sometimes called "low crescent" and "high crescent").

BEGINNER

From all fours, take your right foot back toward the back of the mat. Lift it off the mat like you're standing on the wall behind you, flexing through your foot. Then draw knee to nose, placing your foot in between your hands at the top of the mat. This is a modification of *Anjaneyasana*. Keep your hands on the floor, framing your front foot. *Utthita Ashwa Sanchalanasana* can be done by lifting your torso upright and taking your arms above your head or to your front thigh while keeping your back knee on the ground. Be sure to do both sides.

INTERMEDIATE

From all fours, take your right foot toward the back of the mat. Lift it like you're standing on the wall behind you, flexing through your foot. Then draw knee to nose, placing your foot in between your hands at the top of the mat. Now pressing into the right ball of your foot, lift your back knee off the mat, actively pushing through the sole while pressing down into your left foot at the front of the mat. Keep both your hands on the floor for low lunge. *Utthita Ashwa Sanchalanasana* can be done here with your arms above your head, palms facing each other, or with your hands on your front thigh. Imagine that your torso is a plant growing out of the pot of your pelvis and lifting up.

ADVANCED

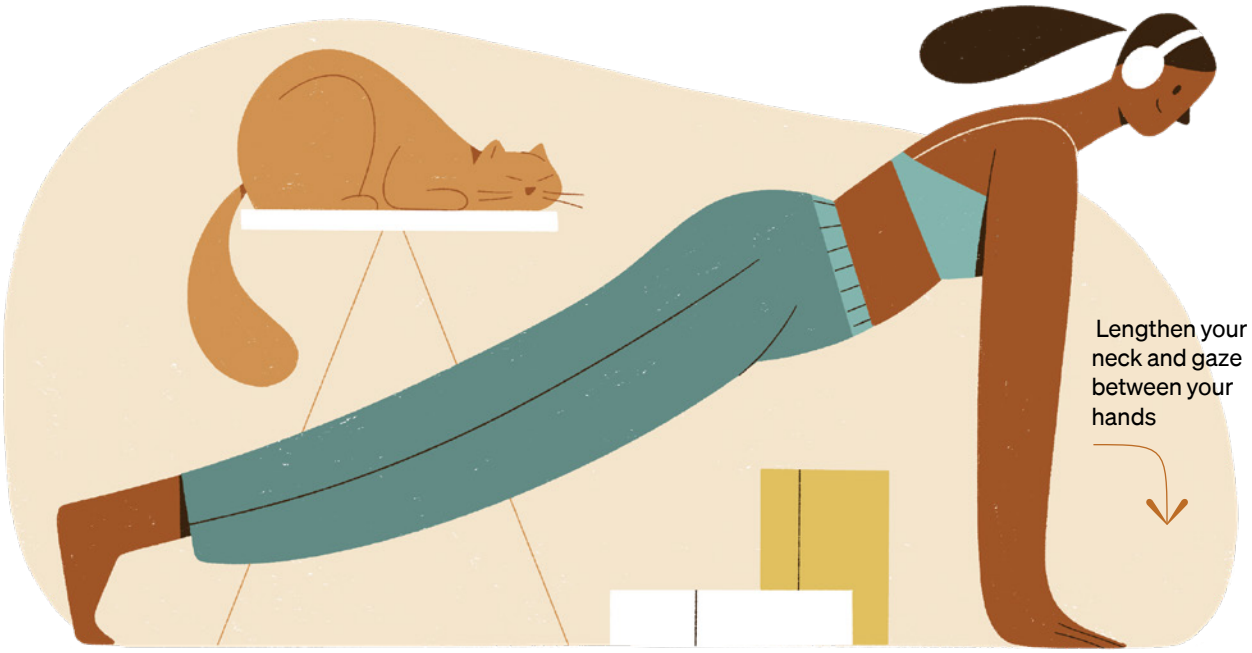
Follow the instructions from the intermediate level to get into *Anjaneyasana*. Lift your back knee off the ground and stack your back heel to above your toes. Your back foot should be perpendicular to the floor. Draw your front foot back and squeeze your thighs toward each other, as if your legs are a pair of scissors. Keep this action and engage your belly to take the weight off your hands and arms. Let your fingertips brush the floor. When you move into *Utthita Ashwa Sanchalanasana*, lift your torso and arms above your head, maintaining that scissoring motion with your thighs. For an extra challenge, deeply bend your front knee so your front thigh comes parallel with the floor.

06

High Plank

PHALAKASANA

A common pose in many different exercise forms, Phalakasana *engages your core, arms, and legs. The intermediate and advanced versions place more weight on your arms and shoulders and engage your core further.*



BEGINNER

From all fours, walk your knees slightly behind your hips and place your hands under your shoulders. This is a modified plank pose that takes some weight off your arms and core. If you have any issues with your knees, consider placing a folded blanket underneath for extra cushion and support.

INTERMEDIATE

From all fours, walk your knees back until your head, shoulders, hips, and knees make one continuous straight line to the floor. As with the beginner pose, if you have any issues with your knees, consider placing a folded blanket underneath for extra cushion and support.

ADVANCED

From all fours or *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, step your feet back until your body makes one continuous, straight line from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet. Engage your core, and draw your belly button to your spine. Shift your weight forward and back on the balls of your feet, finding a place where the soles of your feet are perpendicular to the floor and your hands are under your shoulders. Hold the pose for as long as desired.

07

Low Plank

CHATURANGA

Chaturanga *is very challenging, even for long-practicing yogis. This pose is essentially a half push-up that's held and, in some cases, used as a transition to move into another pose.*

BEGINNER

From your knees-down *Phalakasana*, slowly lower your torso halfway down, wrapping your elbows toward your ribs, until your upper arms and lower arms are perpendicular to each other. Keep your gaze slightly ahead of your hands and engage your core. Hold the pose for at least one full cycle of breath before moving into the next pose.

INTERMEDIATE

From your intermediate *Phalakasana*, slowly lower your torso halfway down, wrapping your elbows toward your ribs, until your upper arms and lower arms are perpendicular to each other. Keep your gaze slightly ahead of your hands and engage your core. Hold the pose for at least one full cycle of breath before moving into the next pose.

ADVANCED

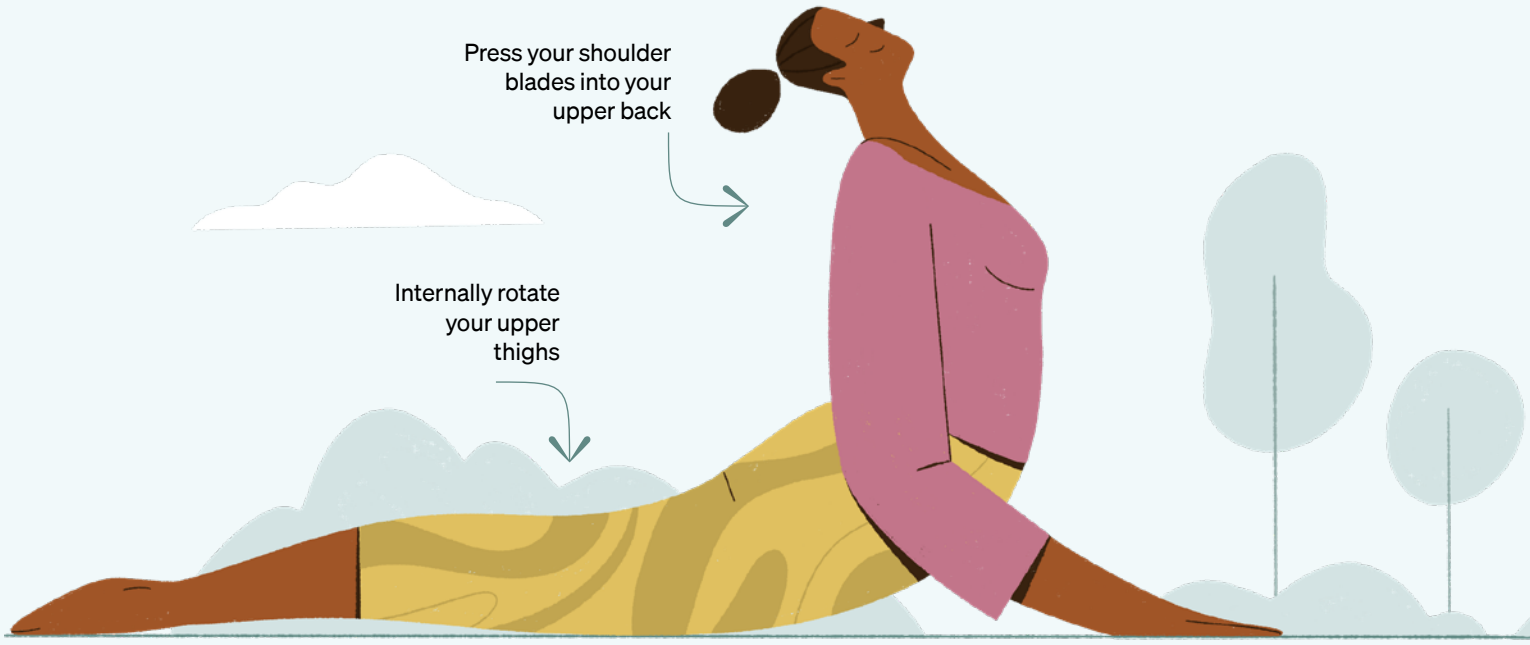
From your advanced *Phalakasana*, slowly lower halfway down, ensuring your elbows brush your ribs. Keep your gaze slightly ahead of your hands; engage your core to keep your body in one continuous line from your head to the soles of your feet. Press back up to *Phalakasana* after one full round of breath, or move into *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana* (page 26).

08

Cobra

BHUJANGASANA

A prone backbending pose ideal for those who are new to the practice or suffer from lower back problems, Bhujangasana *opens your chest and shoulders while keeping your thighs firmly grounded on the mat.*



BEGINNER

From your belly, bring your hands alongside your body on the mat, fingertips in line with the tops of your shoulders. Draw your elbows back toward your ribs. Your elbows will point roughly toward the sky. Take your feet to hips-width distance and press down into the tops of your feet—primarily focusing on grounding all 10 toes into the mat. Internally rotate your upper thighs to keep your sacrum broad; lifting from the back body, gently raise your sternum and head off the floor, putting a little weight in your hands.

INTERMEDIATE

From your belly, place your palms on the floor next to your chest, fingertips in line with the front of your shoulders. Hug your elbows to your sides. Press your hands firmly into the floor and begin to lift your chest. Keeping your elbows drawn to your sides, actively press your shoulder blades into your upper back. Now broaden and expand your chest, pulling your heart forward and up. Without losing the height of your heart, draw your shoulders away from your ears.

ADVANCED

Enter the pose the same way you would in the beginner and intermediate stages. Rather than keeping your hands planted on the ground, hover the palms of your hands above the mat and use your back muscles to lift your heart and sternum. Notice how your breath moves your body. Alternatively, come up into a larger backbend with your hands on the ground.

09

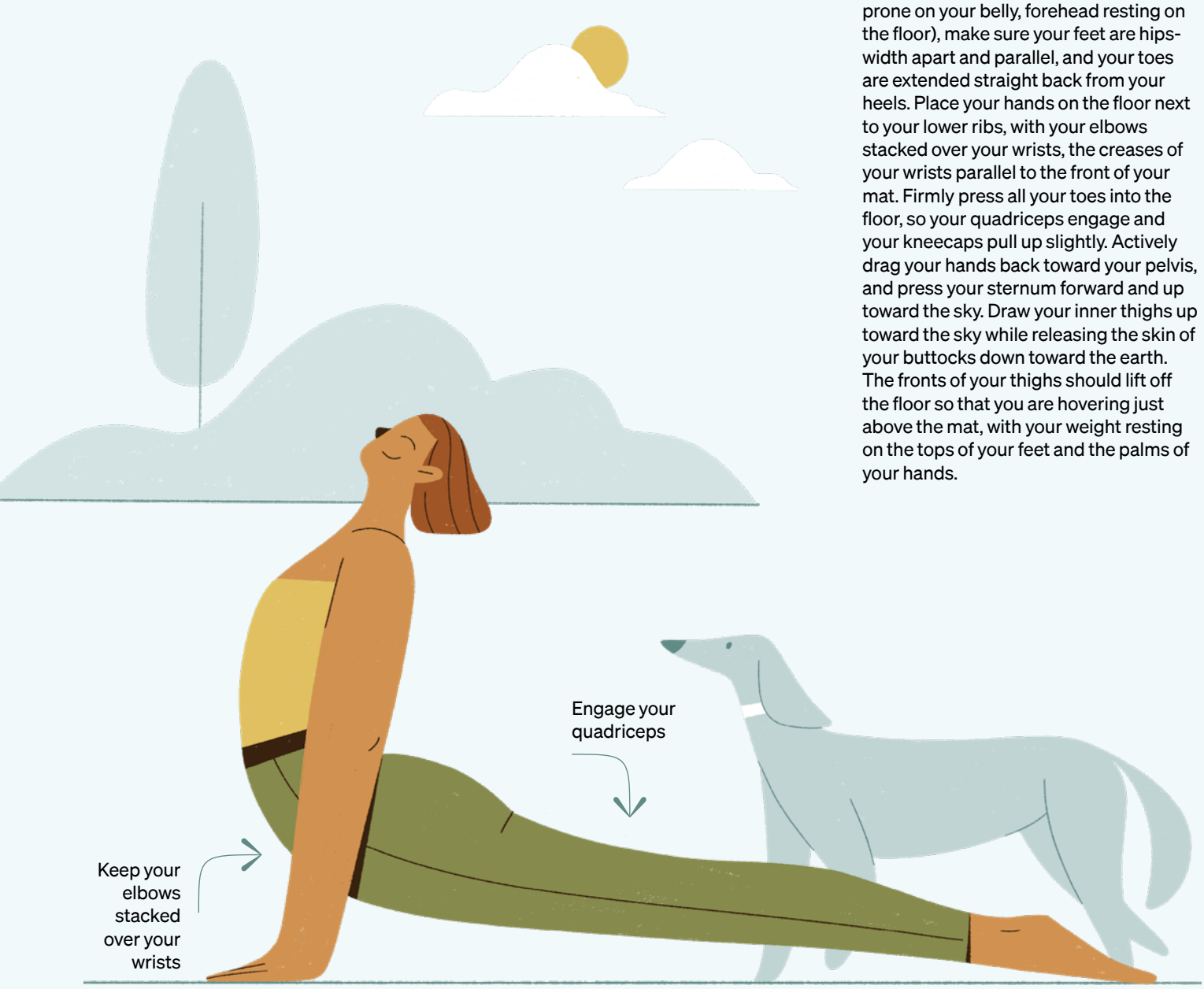
Upward Dog

URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA

A more advanced backbend, this pose opens your chest, shoulders, and belly while your thighs hover above the mat. Experienced practitioners should consider doing both Urdhva Mukha Svanasana *and* Bhujangasana.

INTERMEDIATE & ADVANCED

From your modified *Chaturanga* (or lying prone on your belly, forehead resting on the floor), make sure your feet are hips-width apart and parallel, and your toes are extended straight back from your heels. Place your hands on the floor next to your lower ribs, with your elbows stacked over your wrists, the creases of your wrists parallel to the front of your mat. Firmly press all your toes into the floor, so your quadriceps engage and your kneecaps pull up slightly. Actively drag your hands back toward your pelvis, and press your sternum forward and up toward the sky. Draw your inner thighs up toward the sky while releasing the skin of your buttocks down toward the earth. The fronts of your thighs should lift off the floor so that you are hovering just above the mat, with your weight resting on the tops of your feet and the palms of your hands.



10

Side Angle Pose

UTTHITA PARSVAKONASANA

This pose stretches the sides of your body, from your feet all the way to your fingertips. Using props—like a block under your hand—can make this pose more accessible for those with injuries or restricted movement.

BEGINNER

Begin facing the long side of the mat, arms stretched out to the sides, feet parallel to each other and directly beneath your hands. Externally rotate your right thigh so your foot is parallel to the long side of the mat. Turn your left toes slightly toward your right foot, so your left foot forms a 60-degree angle. Line up your right heel with your left inner arch. On your exhale, bend your right knee and reach your right arm out to the right to lengthen your right side waist. Take your right elbow to your right thigh. Finally, reach your left hand past your head, creating a straight line from your left heel to your left fingertips.

INTERMEDIATE

Facing the long side of the mat, arms stretched out to the sides, move your feet parallel to each other and directly beneath your hands. Externally rotate your right thigh so your foot is parallel to the long side of the mat. Turn your left toes slightly toward your right foot, so your left foot forms a 60-degree angle. Line up your right heel with your left inner arch. On your exhale, bend your right knee and bring your right hand to a block behind your ankle, or take your fingertips all the way down to the floor. Finally, reach your left hand past your head, creating a straight line from your left heel to your left fingertips.

ADVANCED

As you face the long side of the mat, stretch your arms out to the sides, and keep your feet parallel to each other, directly beneath your hands. Externally rotate your right thigh so your foot is parallel to the long side of the mat. Turn your left toes toward your right foot, so your left foot forms a 60-degree angle. Line up your right heel with your left inner arch. On your exhale, bend your right knee, and bring the flat palm of your right hand to the floor outside of your foot. Resist collapsing onto the top of your thigh and actively stretch from fingertips to the sole of your foot. Reach your left hand past your head.

11

Warrior 1 & Warrior 2

VIRABHADRASANA I & VIRABHADRASANA II

These poses are named for Virabhadra, a warrior incarnation of Shiva with a thousand heads. In the first variation, your arms are raised, while in the second, your arms are opened and lowered to shoulder height.

BEGINNER

For *Virabhadrasana I*, start in *Tadasana* and, with an exhale, step your feet 3½ to 4 feet apart. Raise your arms overhead, with your palms facing each other. Turn your left foot inward 45 to 60 degrees to the right and your right foot out 90 degrees to the right. Separate your feet to hips-width distance, exhale, and rotate your torso to the right, squaring the front of your pelvis with the front of your mat. With your left heel anchored to the floor, exhale and bend your right knee over your right ankle, so your shin is perpendicular to the floor. To enter into *Virabhadrasana II*, open and lower your arms to shoulder height. Keep your head turned to the right and gaze over your fingers.

INTERMEDIATE

Follow the steps above, but instead of separating your feet hips-width distance (as if you're standing on railroad tracks), align your right heel with your left heel as if you are on a balance beam. Rotate your pelvis to square (or come as square as possible) to the front of your mat. Focus on working to keep your back heel on the ground. For more intermediate versions of *Virabhadrasana II*, the more parallel you can bring your front thigh to the floor, the more difficult the pose becomes. Be sure to do both sides.

ADVANCED

Follow the steps in the beginner and intermediate instructions, aligning your right heel with your left heel as if you are on a balance beam. Rotate your pelvis so that it squares with the front of your mat. Keep your back heel firmly anchored on the ground. After entering into *Virabhadrasana II,* try to keep your front thigh as parallel to the floor as possible. Be sure to do both sides.

12

Triangle Pose

TRIKONASANA

Trikonasana*, meaning "three-pointed," is a standing pose that offers three points of connection with the floor. For those with limited flexibility, a block may come in handy and provide stability.*

BEGINNER

Stand in *Tadasana*. Exhale and step your feet 3½ to 4 feet apart. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides with your palms down. Next, turn your left foot in slightly to the right and your right foot out to the right 90 degrees. Align your right heel with your left heel. Firm your thighs and turn your right thigh outward, so the center of your right kneecap is in line with the center of your right ankle. Exhale and surf your torso to the right directly over your right leg, bending from your hip joint (not your waist). Allow your left hip to come slightly forward, and lengthen your tailbone toward your back heel. Take your right hand down to your shin; reach up through your top arm, gazing up toward your top thumb. Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to one minute. To lessen the intensity of the pose, step your feet closer together. Be sure to do both sides.

INTERMEDIATE

Follow the steps above. Rather than taking your hand to your shin, take it to your ankle or a block on the floor instead. You can also separate your feet farther apart to increase the intensity of the pose.

ADVANCED

Follow the steps above. Rather than taking your hand to your ankle or a block, take your hand to the floor outside of your right leg instead. Don't collapse into your chest. Imagine that you are between two panes of glass. Hold the pose as you see fit.

13

Revolved Triangle Pose

PARIVRTTA TRIKONASANA

A (literal) twist on the previous asana, this standing pose is a more advanced, spirally version of Trikonasana. *As with the previous pose, a block may provide support and a deeper stretch for those with limited flexibility.*

BEGINNER

Find *Tadasana*, facing the long edge of your mat. Inhale, and step about 3 feet apart; parallel the outside edges of your feet to the outer edges of your mat. Reach your arms out, palms facing down. Turn your left foot inward 60 degrees and turn your right foot outward 90 degrees. Internally rotate your entire left leg until your torso and left hip face the right. Keep your legs straight and your kneecaps lifted. Holding the pose, exhale and rotate your pelvis, abdomen, chest, and head to the right, so that your left arm extends over your right leg. Rest your left fingers on your shin or above your knee as you extend your right arm up. Gaze toward your top hand. Do both sides.

INTERMEDIATE

Find *Tadasana*, facing the long edge of your mat. Inhale, and step about 3 feet apart; parallel the outside edges of your feet to the outer edges of your mat. Reach your arms out, palms facing down. Turn your left foot inward 60 degrees and turn your right foot outward 90 degrees. Internally rotate your entire left leg until your torso and left hip face the right. Keep your legs straight and your kneecaps lifted. Holding the pose, exhale and rotate your pelvis, abdomen, chest, and head to the right, so that your left arm extends over your right leg. Rest your left hand on a block as you extend your right arm up. Gaze toward your top hand. Do both sides.

ADVANCED

Find *Tadasana*, facing the long edge of your mat. Inhale, and step 3 feet apart; parallel the outside edges of your feet to the outer edges of your mat. Reach your arms out, palms facing down. Turn your left foot inward 60 degrees and turn your right foot outward 90 degrees. Internally rotate your entire left leg until your torso and left hip face the right. Keep your legs straight and your kneecaps lifted. Holding the pose, exhale and rotate your pelvis, abdomen, chest, and head to the right, so that your left arm extends over your right leg. Rest your left palm flat to the floor on the outside of your shin as you extend your right arm up. Gaze toward your top hand. Do both sides.

14

Staff Pose

DANDASANA

This is a seated pose that targets your hamstrings and hips. The goal in the beginner stage is to have your posture aligned with the natural curve of your spine. Props like a blanket or bolster can help provide support.

BEGINNER

Sit on the floor with your legs together and extended in front of your torso. If your torso is leaning back, it may be because you have tight hamstrings; try sitting on a blanket or a bolster to lift the pelvis and find the natural curve of your spine. Sit toward the front of your sitting bones and flex your feet. Place your hands on blocks or on the floor next to your hips with your fingertips facing forward. Some teachers have you forward fold from this position.

INTERMEDIATE

Remove or reduce the props you're sitting on to get a deeper stretch into the hamstrings.

ADVANCED

If you want a deeper hamstring stretch, fold forward, keeping the back long. Some very flexible yogis can get their nose to their knees.

15

Corpse Pose

SAVASANA

Savasana allows you to reconnect to your body and your breath at the end of class. There are plenty of variations (you can elevate the calves or head), but this is a relaxation pose. There are no physical advancements to make.

ALL LEVELS

Lie on your back, close your eyes, and face your palms up toward the ceiling.

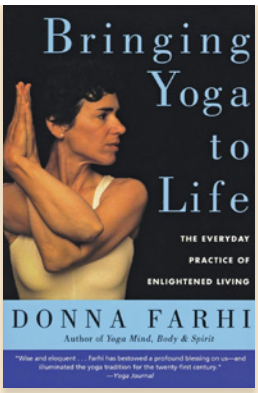
Gradually work through your body, noting the tensions. Release them. Nourish yourself with relaxation. Observe the sensation of lightness. Then, when you're ready, come out of *Savasana* by taking a few deep breaths. With practice, you'll be able to feel yourself regaining a physical awareness of your fingers and toes, then your limbs and head. Slowly begin to move your body.

Don't underestimate the importance of *Savasana*—or its difficulty. In many ways, it can be the most challenging pose; stillness, especially in the modern world, can seem elusive. *Savasana* requires you to be calm while remaining in the present. The active asanas guide you here, helping to stretch your muscles and relax your diaphragm, allowing you to breathe deeply and freely.

Be gentle and attentive. Be patient.

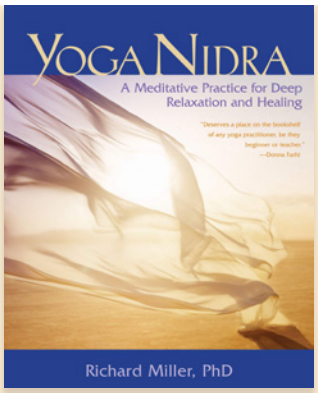
THE LAST WORD

Seminal texts to expand your yoga practice beyond the mat



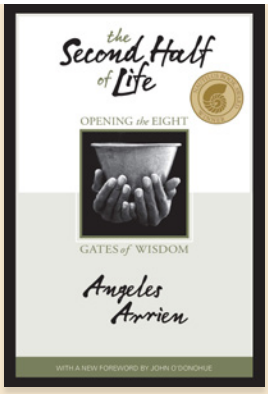
Bringing Yoga to Life: The Everyday Practice of Enlightened Living by Donna Farhi

Donna's instant classic goes far beyond the asana, exploring the philosophy of yoga within the tradition's intended framework: the improvement of our everyday lives.



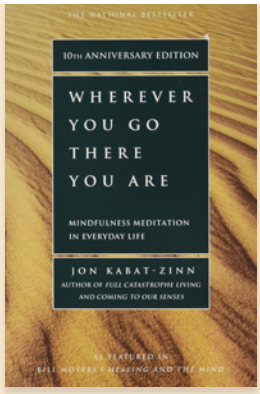
Yoga Nidra: A Meditative Practice for Deep Relaxation and Healing by Richard Miller

For those interested in pursuing guided meditation, Donna recommends this volume from Miller, who lays out the practice's tenets with crisp, eloquent simplicity.



The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom by Angeles Arrien

The anthropologist and award-winning author of *The Four-Fold Way* takes lessons from a variety of cultures to explore ideas about aging and the importance of personal legacy.

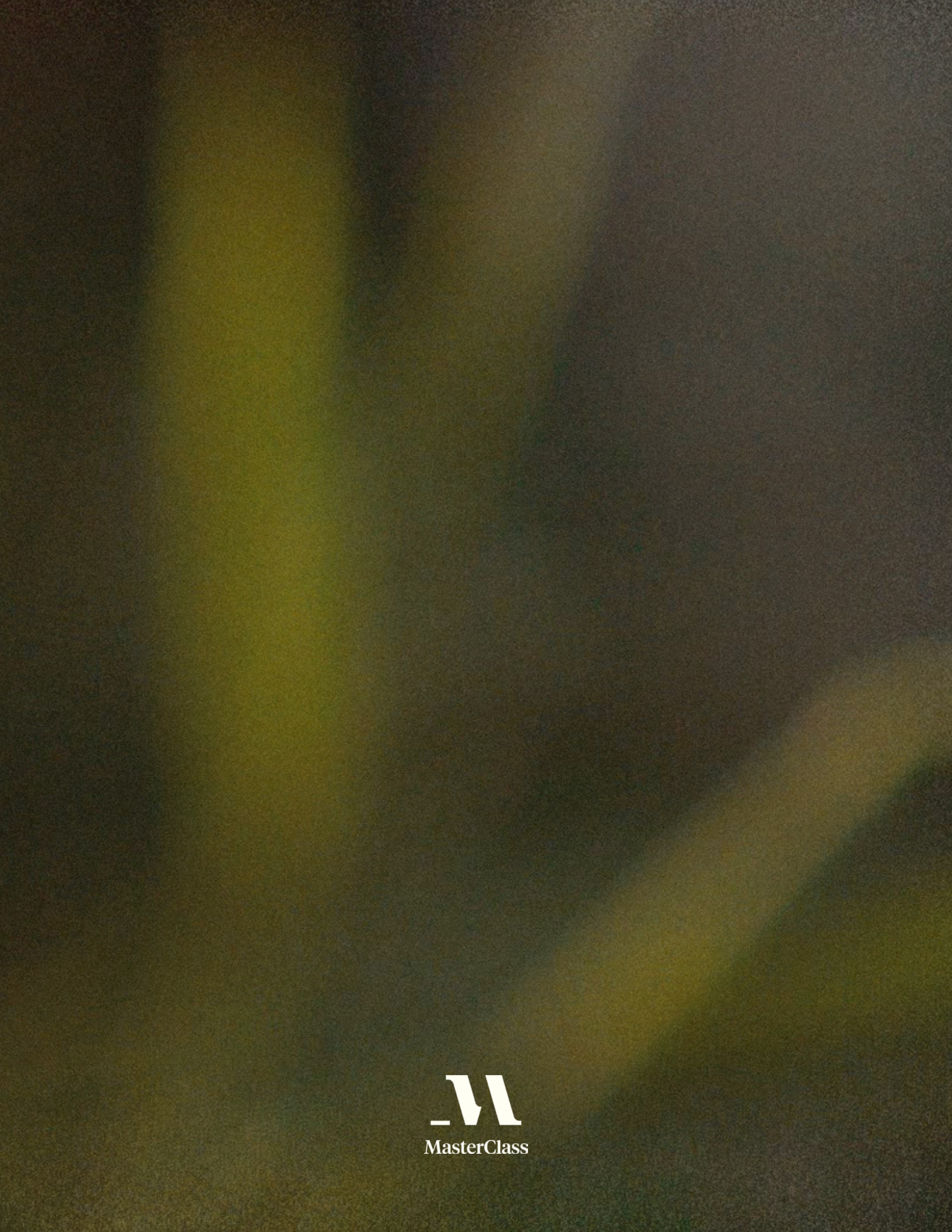


Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn

The MIT molecular biologist and mindfulness researcher maps out a pragmatic path for cultivating the self, showing us how to reclaim the inherent richness in every moment.

The Yellow Book by Baba Hari Dass

Described by Donna as "the genuine article," the yogi Baba Hari Dass, who observed a vow of silence for 78 years, published this collection of sayings and questions in 1973, promoting honesty, meditation, and the value of play.


MasterClass